STATINTL [redacted]

The Cause Celebre of Colonel Penkovskiy

At a time when observers have been speculating on Khrushchev's future, a serious new complication has arisen: the politically sensitive espionage case of Col. Oleg Penkovskiy, a much decorated, brilliant young officer of the Soviet Army.

In Penkovskiy, the Soviet government, which has only just put to rest the Nazi-fabricated Tukhachevskiy case, is confronted with a Soviet General Staff officer who is hostile to the government, and who has had a network of friends and connections reaching into the highest Soviet circles, especially the upper military officer corps. This is one of those rare cases, like the Dreyfus case in France in the '90s, the Otto John affair, and the Alger Hiss case, which does not merely involve a spy who has been caught and the secrets he has betrayed, but which also has far-reaching political ramifications. In these cases, the accused appears to be politically motivated, and he typifies (or in the case of Dreyfus, was wrongly believed to typify) a much larger group, regarded by some as a danger to the state itself. At best, such cases imply that leading officials are criminally negligent. At worst, these cases suggest--at least to some minds--that a conspiracy exists which leads to the very top, and which high officials are concealing. Rival parties embrace rival conspiracy theories, casting their opponents to the role of conspirators, and thus embittering political relations.

Penkovskiy, who was arrested last December, was an Assistant Military Attache (a military intelligence post) in Ankara in 1955-6, and was later assigned to the State Committee for the Coordination of Scientific Research Work. In this sensitive position, evidently also a military intelligence assignment, he met foreign scientists and businessmen visiting the USSR, and he also travelled abroad. That is known to many non-Soviets.

According to Turkish news reports, Col. Penkovskiy fought in the Soviet-Finnish War and in World War II, and by 1945, at 26, he became a Lieutenant Colonel. His decorations include two Orders of the Red Banner, the Order of the Red Star, the Order of Alexander Nevskiy, and the Order of the Patriotic War, First Class. His wife is a daughter of a Soviet general, and his uncle a General of the Army, is a Deputy in the Supreme Soviet, a candidate member of the Communist Party Control Committee, and the Commander of the Belo-Russian Military District. His father, according to a western acquaintance, was an officer in the White forces during the Civil War, and was executed by Stalin. Col. Penkovskiy is a graduate of the Frunze Military Academy.

In Turkey, Col. Penkovskiy did not conceal his poor relations with his chief, General Rubenko, and on later occasions he told visiting westerners of his disgust with and hatred for the Kremlin's rule, the brutality of which concealed by hollow catchwords about peace, the people, and socialist progress. He gave the impression of a patriotic Russian, longing for democratic freedom and for honest in public life. Perhaps reports of these attitudes reached the ears of his superiors, for Penkovskiy was not promoted after 1950. But he kept his position in a highly sensitive post, and it appears that he was "sponsored" by certain high-level officers. There are continuing rumors that General I. A. Serov, a former chief of the Committee for State Security (KGB), and until shortly after Penkovskiy's arrest last December, the Chief of Military Intelligence (GRU), was been arrested because he protected Penkovskiy. Serov's son, an Aeroflot representative in Helsinki, was recently been recalled to the USSR. Marshal Matvei Zakharov, the Chief of Staff of the Red Army and Serov's immediate superior, was removed from his post in March, and replaced by Marshal Sergei Biryuzov. Chief Marshal of the Artillery Sergei Varentsov, Penkovskiy's WWII Commander and friend, is also rumored to have been dismissed. Penkovskiy's chief in the State Scientific Committee, D. M. Gvishiani,

is probably in trouble, and Gvishiani is the son-in-law of First Deputy Premier Aleksi Nikolaevich Kosygin/

In the atmosphere of the Kremlin, the wildest suspicions could arise with far less provocation than this. On the one hand, many of those involved have been close to N.S. Khrushchev, and Khrushchev's dogmatist enemies could at the least blame him for being over-liberal, lacking in "vigilance," and risking Soviet security. The more imaginative of them may even link Khrushchev to western intelligence,. On the other hand, the case could well be turned against the professional military leadership, and Khrushchev might claim that Penkovskiy, aided by a group of officers like the Beck-Stauffenberg group in wartime Germany, has kept the west informed of Soviet plans, for example in the case of the Cuban missiles last fall. At a minimum, Khrushchev might use the Penkovskiy case to clean out those officers who resist his modernization plans, and who argue for massive and expensive ground forces.

A prosecutor drawing up a case against the military could allege that, despite all the purges and the fall of Marshal Georgiy Zhukov in 1957, there persists a cult of army professionalism which is hostile to party control, and counter-revolutionary in inspiration. Articles by army officers have appeared in the Soviet press which lend substance to such a charge. Marshal Rodion Malinovskiy, in an article last February on the "Volgograd" victory, played down Khruschev's role and praised the work of "Comrade" Zhukov. In the February 26 issue of Kommunist of the Armed Forces, one Col. M. Skidro argued that, while technical developments had forced political leaders to become military specialists, they had also forced military leaders to be "active conductors of the policy of the state." "At the present time," Skidro wrote, this role of the military leaders "is growing." In a possible reference to the withdrawal of missiles from Cuba, Skidro quoted Friedrich Engels to say that the role of the military leader may be greatest "at the moment of failure,

when the army has suffered defeat and is forced to retreat." This could be read as a bid for a military dictatorship.

To judge by reports, Penkovskiy was not a nostalgic admirer of Czarism, or an advocate of military dictatorship. But the fact that Penkovskiy's father was a counter-revolutionary could make the case a pretext for "rooting out counter-revolutionary elements." Early in the Civil War, Trotsky and Lenin discovered that they needed tough, experienced officers and NCO's, not agitators, malingerers and summer patriots. As a result, even today the Red Army has men in its ranks whose past includes meritorius Czarist service. A prominent example is Marshal Malinovskiy himself, whom some have linked with Penkovskiy. In the course of cultivating relations with western newspapermen, Malinovskiy has several times stated that he fought by the side of the British and Americans on the Western Front in World War I. Malinovskiy, who had already won a St. George's Cross, went to France as an 18-year old corporal in one of two Russian expeditionary brigades. After the Nivelle offensive and the February Revolution, some of these Russian troops came under Bolshevik influence, and refused to fight, with the eventual result that in September 1917, they were shelled at the camps of La Courtine in central France by loyal Russian forces under French direction. The leaders were imprisoned and their followers were put in labor brigades or sent to North Africa. Some Malinovskiy press releases claim that he was a leader of the mutineers, but his name is not inconsistent with his own claim of service with the British and Americans; prior to the mutiny, the Russians served only with the French. Actually, Malinovskiy Appears to have been a member of the loyalist Russian Legion, which was cited for its service in 1918 on the Somme, at Amiens, and at Soissons, all after the treaty of Brest Litovsk. It may well be that he was among those who suppressed the mutiny at La Courtine. After all, only the hardest kind of disciplinarian could survive as a Red Army general in World War II, under Stalin and in the face of the German advance.

There are other officers and officials whose revolutionary past is also somewhat hazy.

Precisely because the Penkovskiy case is such a revelation of weakness, nepotism, and division, the Soviet leadership may try to avoid publicity and public political exploitation. Neither the CPSU, the KGB, nor the Red Army will wish to hang their dirty linen in front of the Soviet public. Replacements of suspect officials and officers may be spread out over several months, and propaganda may stress the "dirty work" of Western intelligence. So far, the Soviet press has greatly understated Penkovskiy's own importance, even concealing the fact that he was an officer, and has concentrated on the unfortunate Greville Wynne. But the men in the Kremlin and the Soviet Defense Ministry know the significance of the case, and they know that the case may be used in the political power struggle.